



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **TWO NEW ORLEANS MEN ADMIT OFFERING TO SELL FALSE IDENTITIES TO ASSIST MEMBERS OF TERRORIST ORGANIZATION**

JACKSON, MISS. – Michael A. Holt, Special Agent-in-Charge in New Orleans for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); Dunn Lampton, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi; and James Letten, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Louisiana, announced that two New Orleans men, **Cedric Carpenter** and **Lamont Ranson**, pleaded guilty today to their involvement in a conspiracy to sell false documents to purported members of **Abu Sayyaf**, a Philippines-based group that has been designated as a foreign terrorist organization.

Both defendants entered their guilty pleas earlier today before U.S. District Judge Tom S. Lee in federal district court in Jackson, Mississippi, where the defendants had traveled during the conspiracy. Carpenter, whose status as a previously convicted felon prohibited him from owning a gun, also pleaded guilty to possessing a firearm at the time of his arrest in New Orleans.

As alleged in the felony Information, Carpenter and Ranson agreed to produce false identification documents, namely, Mississippi driver's licenses, Social Security cards, and birth certificates, knowing that the intended recipients of the false identification documents were represented to be members of Abu Sayyaf. Pursuant to the Immigration and Nationality Act, Abu Sayyaf was designated as a foreign terrorist organization in October 1997 and has been redesignated every two years thereafter, in 1999, 2001, and 2003.

“Criminal organizations willing to sell false identities to anyone for any purpose pose a serious threat to our homeland. The defendants in this case had no qualms about providing fraudulent IDs to people they believed were terrorists. They now face serious consequences for their actions,” said Michael J. Garcia, the Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

ICE agents in New Orleans conducted an eight-month investigation of the criminal activities of Carpenter and Ranson. In April 2004, Carpenter and Ranson approached an individual on a cruise ship seeking illegal narcotics, and offering to provide false identity documents.

Beginning in June 2004, Carpenter and Ranson had discussions with confidential informants of the Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), about a proposal to produce false identification documents for a group of individuals identified as members of Abu Sayyaf. Ranson was familiar with Abu Sayyaf from his prior service with the U.S. Navy in Far East.

During a series of telephone calls that followed, Carpenter and Ranson continued to describe their ability and willingness to produce authentic documents with fraudulent identifiers using pictures to be supplied by the informants. In late June 2004, Carpenter told one of the informants by telephone that he was then in Jackson, Mississippi to "line up" his contacts for producing the fraudulent identities.

According to the felony information, in early July 2004, Carpenter met with the informant and displayed a complete set of fraudulent identification documents (birth certificate, Social Security card, and Mississippi driver's license) bearing Carpenter's photograph and a stolen identity. After viewing the documents, the informant requested five sets of documents. Carpenter responded with an asking price of \$100,000, stating he wanted \$50,000 in currency and \$50,000 worth of heroin (about half a kilogram). In August 2004, Carpenter continued to express interest in completing the transaction, but, ultimately, no deal was ever concluded.

As described by the prosecution during the guilty plea today, on August 31, 2004, ICE agents arrested defendants Carpenter and Ransom at their homes in New Orleans. The arrest warrants were issued based upon a criminal complaint filed with the United States District Court of the Southern District of Mississippi.

Upon the defendants' arrest, ICE agents learned that the defendants had rented a hotel room at the Hampton Inn, in New Orleans East, which the defendants used to produce fraudulent documents and to store the equipment to produce the false IDs. A search of the hotel room led to the discovery of document-making implements that the defendants used to produce fraudulent IDs, including computers and printers capable of producing the false IDs. With the assistance of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Louisiana, ICE agents obtained search warrants for the computers.

Following their arrests, the defendants made their first appearance before now-United States District Judge Louis Guirola, Jr., in Gulfport, and were ordered to be transported to Jackson for further proceedings. On September 2, 2004, United States Magistrate Judge James C. Sumner ordered both defendants detained pending trial following a detention hearing in Jackson.

On September 21, 2004, a Federal Grand Jury indicted Ranson and Carpenter for violations of 18 USC 1028, Producing Fraudulent Identification Documents; 18 USC 371, Conspiracy; 21 USC 846, Conspiracy to Distribute Heroin, and under 21 USC 853, Criminal Forfeiture.

As part of the guilty plea, both defendants admitted to conspiring to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization in violation of federal law, 18 USC 2339 (B). Based on this charge, the defendants face a maximum sentence of 15 years imprisonment, a maximum fine of \$250,000, and a period of supervised release of up to three years. For the separate charge of being a felon in possession of a firearm, Carpenter faces a maximum sentence of five years imprisonment; a maximum fine of \$250,000; a maximum of three years of supervised release; and a mandatory \$100.00 special assessment.

Southern District of Mississippi Assistant U.S. Attorney Gaines Cleveland and First Assistant U.S. Attorney Stan Harris are the prosecutors in charge of the case. Mr. Lampton and Mr. Letten praised the efforts of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for its diligent work in the investigation of this case.

Both U.S. Attorneys emphasized that, at no time in this case was there any imminent foreign terrorist threat to the United States. However, the U.S. Attorneys added that this investigation was very important in helping to identify active criminal elements operating in both districts who were willing to furnish fraudulent identity documents to willing purchasers regardless of who the intended recipients were or how such documents would be used.

ICE Special Agent-in-Charge Michael Holt added that, “we will continue to work diligently to weed out those individuals who are willing to cause us harm and threaten the nation’s security.”

Special Agent-in-Charge Holt also commended state and local law enforcement officers in Mississippi and Louisiana who contributed to the success of this investigation. “The Mississippi Highway Patrol’s contribution to this investigation cannot be overstated. Their complete cooperation and willingness to assist ICE in this investigation is largely responsible for its success. Though these violators alleged that they had access to Mississippi driver’s license information for use in their ‘scheme,’ there was absolutely no evidence that would substantiate their claim. We have no reason to believe the Mississippi driver’s license database was compromised in any fashion,” said Holt.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*